

JUST FIND US A PLACE TO LIVE

Travellers' protest at council office backed by a human rights group

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DESPERATE travellers converged on council offices to plead with officials to find them alternative land to live on.

Wielding banners emblazoned with the slogans "Defend human rights Dale Farm" and "Stop bailiffs from hurting our babies", travellers from the illegal site in Crays Hill marched on the Basildon Centre on Monday

morning. Members of the travelling community handed a legal memorandum over to Basildon District Council which has been drawn up by a human rights organisation backing their cause.

The 15-page document, written by the Centre on Housing Rights and Forced Evictions, asks the council for clarification on whether or not the council will provide 62 pitches for travellers by the year 2011 as they were instructed to do so by the Government.

Leticia Osorio, a senior legal officer for the group and a student at Essex University, spoke to the Gazette from Brazil.

"We feel the idea of an eviction is wrong," she said. "We feel the cost is too high and that the council has to provide a certain amount of pitches and they should."

The gypsies also have concerns over the bailiff firm tipped to be awarded the contract to evict the 86 families.

A 26-page dossier has been handed to the

council in a bid to deter them from using Constant & Co, the company behind previous evictions in the area who have always denied any wrong doing.

Dale Farm resident Dolly Sheridan, 56, said: "I've been moved from a site by bailiffs before.

"They pulled out all the gas tubes, broke down the fences and were dragging the caravans out with babies inside.

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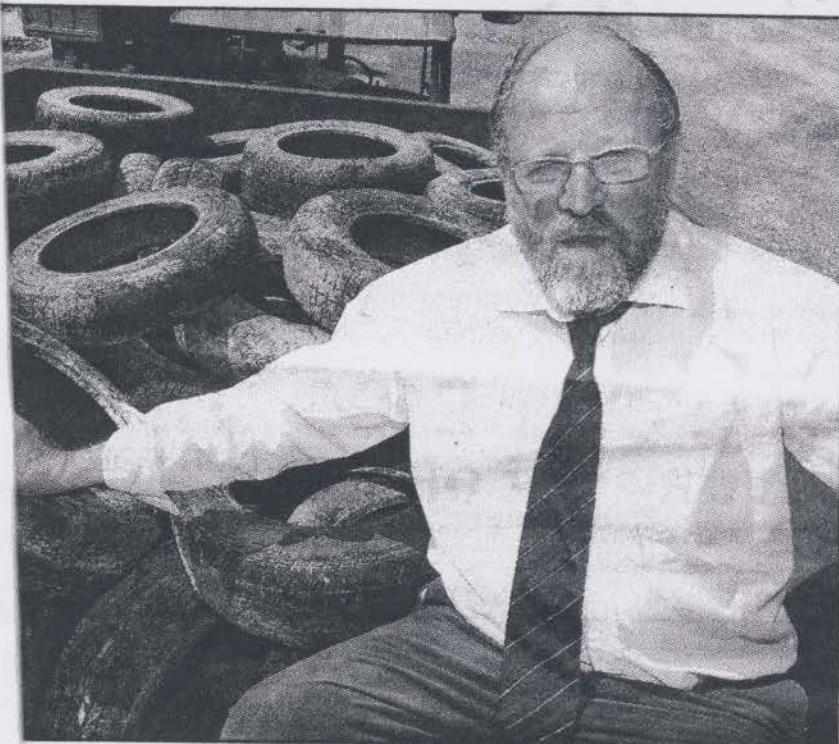
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**New cop
gets tough
on crime**

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as he retrieved from the River Crouch, which the Environment Agency refused to collect

arrior saved from paying big bill te firm take imped tyres

a bit of community spirit and I couldn't really believe no one would take them.

"I was getting hassled from my wife because they started smelling outside our house, but I wasn't going to throw them back."

At one point, Mr Hart, who is a Rettendon and Battlesbridge parish councillor, thought he might have to shell out £480 himself after he was told it would cost £4 for every tyre he wanted to dispose of.

Ludicrous

He said: "All I was trying to do was make the river a nicer place and to think I might have had to pay to dispose of them seemed ludicrous."

"After I got the initial quote I got another which was only 70p a tire."

A spokesman for Basildon District Council said, after some consideration, they had offered to pick up the tyres

free of charge, but Mr Hart had declined the offer in favour of a private company.

"The river actually crosses the border into Chelmsford," the spokesman added. "It is a very grey area and we are not sure it is our responsibility to actually do this. We would have asked the Environment Agency for a contribution."

Environment Agency spokesman Peter Rickett confirmed that Mr Hart had contacted them for permission but added: "The Environment Agency may remove rubbish from a river if it increases the risk of flooding."

"In this instance there was no increased risk of flooding."

Meanwhile, Mr Hart says he is looking at setting up a river trust to protect it in future. He said: "I think I will put £1,000 in a bank account to make sure it is kept clean and tidy."

is fight to the last to defend their homes

Gazette comment

decade, but to no avail. The organisation says this would allow the council to meet the

AS Billericay welcomes new officer PC Marc Clifford and his plans to get tough on troublesome teens, the Gazette visited the High Street to find out what issues you feel the police should be prioritising.



Suzanne Hammett, 45, from Queens Park, in Billericay, said: "I think they

Please find us a place to call home

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"I DON'T want to think about it happening again. I will be in hospital before it does because I can't go through that again."

Sylvia Taylor, 63, said: "I am petrified of the day they come to evict us. Every night I wonder what is going to happen."

Fellow Dale Farm resident, Marie McCarthy, 57, restated her claim for staying put. She said: "We moved into Dale Farm seven years ago."

"We came in as a big family and we don't want to be separated."

And for some of her neighbours that plea may be answered because one of the plots on the illegal portion of Dale Farm appears to be immune from eviction because of a legal anomaly.

The land at 27 Beauty Drive cannot be cleared by bailiffs because its ownership was unclaimed following a fatal fire in May 2005.

According to traveller spokesman Grattan Puxon the land was not left to anyone following the death of John and Kathleen McCarthy.

He said: "The council has written to us saying they can clear the hard standing but not the actual caravans, which is a curious position."

Facade to be retained

THE historic facade of High Street cottages should be retained, claim town councillors.

They rejected a bid to demolish Elizabeth Cottages, in Billericay High Street and replace them with an extended building which would house three flats above a retail unit.

It was recommended the scheme should be rejected on the grounds it would increase the traffic congestion on the corner of a very busy crossroads while building work takes place.

Councillors were also concerned about the effect on the street scene but did suggest the facade could be retained as an alternative to complete demolition.



David O'Callaghan, 47, from Laindon said: "There should be more vigilance when it comes to farmers."

"I have a friend who is a farmer and he has had animals let loose."